

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS OF THE DOMESTIC ADVISORY GROUP (DAG)

1 FEBRUARY 2023

ITEM 1 - Update from the Chair

1. Sean McGuire (SMcG) formally welcomed all members and provided an update of the changes to the Executive Council of the DAG. Paul Nowak stood down from the UK DAG and the Executive Council last year, following his appointment as General Secretary of the TUC. Steve Turner, Assistant General Secretary, Unite the Union, will replace Paul as Vice Chair of the Executive Council, representing the trade unions. Irene Oldfather remains as Vice Chair, representing the voluntary and third sector.
2. SMcG stressed the importance of informing the FCDO directly of any changes within members' organisations concerning DAG representation.

ITEM 2 - Feedback on last joint UK/EU DAG meeting and Civil Society Forum

3. Members reflected positively on the joint DAG as a forum for mutually beneficial dialogue and collaboration. However, it was noted that some governance issues needed to be addressed, namely on the procedures for agreeing joint EU-UK DAG statements in order to allow proper consultation with members of the UK DAG.
4. Members agreed with the reflection made that the CSF meeting in October 2022 was more 'theatre' than 'dialogue'. Greater efforts are needed to make this forum productive and a place where members' concerns can be adequately discussed and where possible resolved.
5. Additionally, members called for greater transparency on the selection processes for both the participants and the agenda topics of future CSFs.

Action:

- Executive Council to liaise with FCDO Secretariat for support to be better prepared for the CSF.
- Executive Council to liaise with EU DAG to identify shared priorities and agree on the processes for future joint statements.

ITEM 3 - Work Priorities for the UK DAG in 2023 and creation of subgroups

6. Sean McGuire summarised that in the feedback received prior to the UK DAG meeting, mobility, regulation in all its form - co-operation, convergence, divergence on both sides, REUL and Level Playing Field (LPF) - and the future TCA review in 2025 were the main areas identified as priorities.
7. In the discussion that followed, there was general consensus that the DAG should:
 - first and foremost focus on practical issues relating to the implementation and functioning of the TCA.
 - remain attentive to the political environment and consider intervening if and when necessary.
 - begin preparations for the 2025 Review of the TCA.
8. Members raised a number of other areas of concern such as the current impasse on the Northern Ireland Protocol, energy and climate change regulation and policies, customs/trade facilitation, data flows and adequacy, Rules of Origin and LPF.
9. In relation to the review of the TCA, members expressed a strong desire to include issues that are currently outside of the scope of the text as it stands, notably services.
10. Members supported the creation of subgroups in accordance with Article 8 of the Terms of Reference of the Domestic Advisory Group. However, it was noted that whilst Article 8 does set out the parameters on the creation, duration and functioning of a subgroup, it remains somewhat vague on structure, composition and the process of agreeing the establishment of subgroups.

Therefore, it was agreed that the Executive Council, in conjunction with the DAG Secretariat, would meet to draw up clearer terms and conditions and governance structures on subgroups.

11. Whilst members supported the creation of subgroups, it was repeatedly stressed by many that (i) the number of subgroups should be limited to a possible maximum of 3 per year, (ii) participation of the subgroups be representative of all sectors, (iii) there must be a clear and well defined 'exam question' as to what issues the subgroup aims to address, (iv) that outputs must be focused and purposeful and have the support of the majority of the DAG and (v) avoid duplication.
12. Members agreed that the themes of the subgroups must be in line with the agreed work priorities for the DAG. Moreover, it was noted that the DAG is only but one forum for action and should not overload itself with priorities. Therefore, focus should be on issues where the DAG/subgroups can add real value and present something unique and new.
13. Members were also invited to share information, intelligence as well as position and research papers on sector-specific issues with the group.

Action:

- Executive Council to meet to establish the processes for:
 - Establishing subgroups.
 - Agreeing on the mandate of a subgroup.
 - Selection of members of the subgroup to ensure fairness.
 - Adopting positions agreed by a specific subgroup.
- Executive Council to assess how to best include sector-specific concerns under the mandate of the DAG.
- Executive Council to invite members of other EU DAGs to give their insights on what makes a subgroup effective.

ITEM 4: - 2023 Meetings

14. Members requested more advanced notification of meetings dates, locations, and agendas. Members also expressed strong interest in more sector specific meetings and welcomed the participation of external speakers, such as MPs and MEPs who sit on the respective Parliamentary Partnership Assemblies as well as members of the Specialised Committees.

Action:

- Executive Council to speak to FCDO Secretariat about dates and speakers for meetings for this year.

ITEM 5 - Secretariat Support

15. Members called for the DAG to be better supported by the FCDO Secretariat, notably on (i) logistics, (ii) meeting preparations and conclusions, (iii) information sharing, (iv) updates on agendas and outcomes of Specialised Committees and (v) dedicated briefings from UK Ministers/civil servants on specific issues e.g. REUL.
16. Whilst some called for more financial support from the FCDO to cover travel costs, others stressed that as we sign up to join these types of fora, we must shoulder the cost. However, it was duly noted that having advance notice of in-person meetings can help members plan and thus limit costs and that the use of virtual meetings continues to be an effective means of connecting the DAG.

Action:

- Executive Council to discuss secretariat and administrative support with the FCDO Secretariat in order to better support the work and the activities of the DAG.